

FAST-DRAFT YOUR WAY  
TO A COMPLETE  
MEMOIR

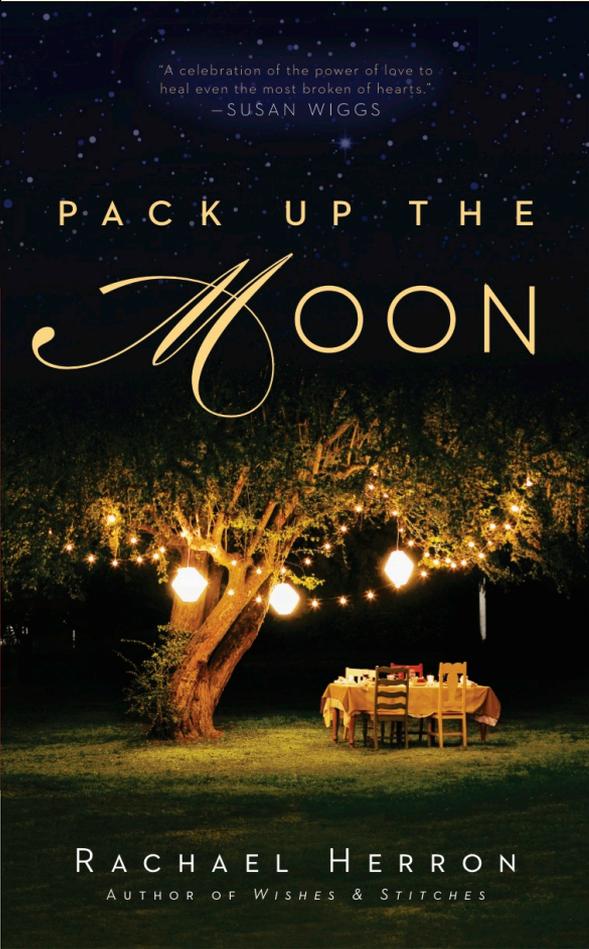
Rachael Herron

# Rachael Herron

- 23 books (mainstream lit, feminist romance, memoir, and nonfiction), hybrid.
- Bestselling! Still kinda broke. This isn't a get rich quick scheme!
- Instructor at Stanford and Berkeley in the creative writing depts.



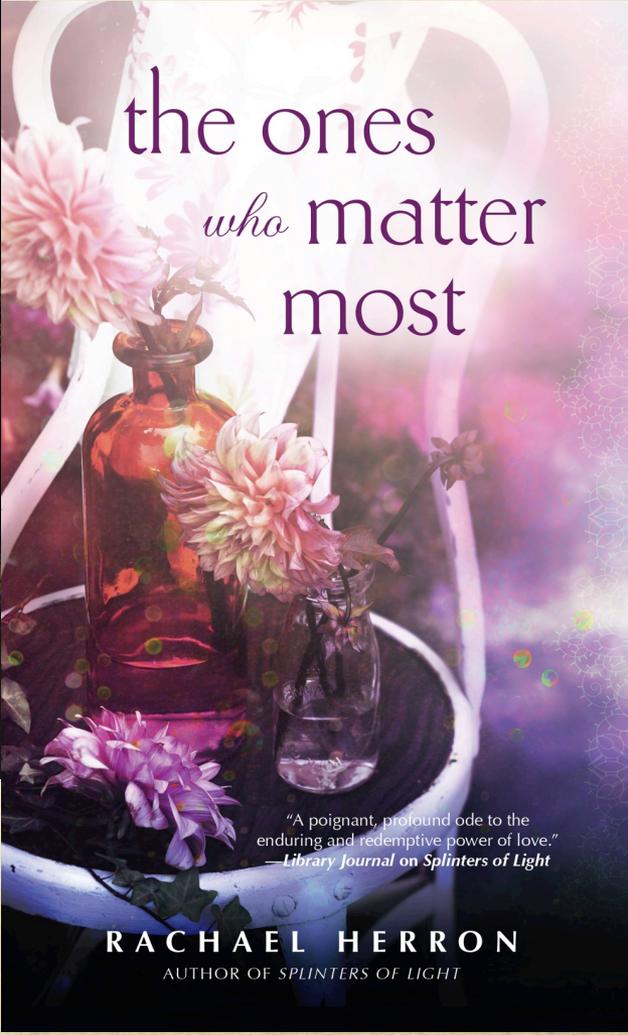
*a novel*  
*How to Knit  
a Love Song*  
A CYPRESS HOLLOW YARN  
*Rachael Herron*



"A celebration of the power of love to  
heal even the most broken of hearts."  
—SUSAN WIGGS

PACK UP THE  
*MOON*

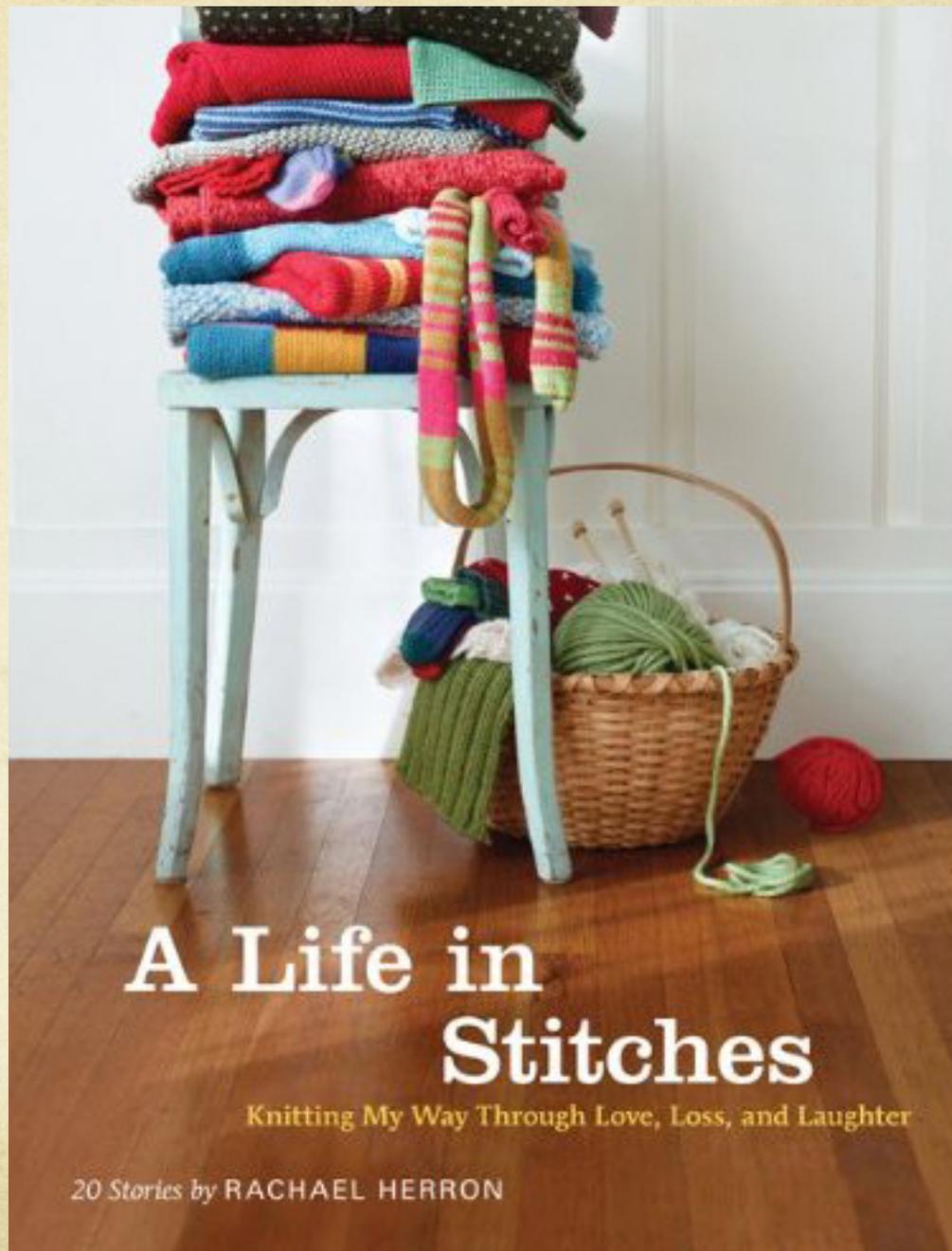
RACHAEL HERRON  
AUTHOR OF WISHES & STITCHES



the ones  
who matter  
most

"A poignant, profound ode to the  
enduring and redemptive power of love."  
—Library Journal on *Splinters of Light*

RACHAEL HERRON  
AUTHOR OF SPLINTERS OF LIGHT



# A Life in Stitches

Knitting My Way Through Love, Loss, and Laughter

20 Stories by RACHAEL HERRON

# FAST-DRAFT *your* MEMOIR

WRITE YOUR LIFE STORY  
IN 45 HOURS



FROM BESTSELLING MEMOIRIST

*Rachael Herron*

# Remember!

- I am completely right about all of this!
- Unless I am wrong, and what I say doesn't work for you.
- Don't trust anyone who says the first sentence without adding the second.

What *is* memoir, anyway?

Your memoir will only cover a few  
select years or a few select issues.

Today, we think about those “few.”

## Types of Memoirs

- Celebrity, athletic, political or public figure
- Travel
- Spiritual
- Food
- Grief
- Animal
- Farmsteading
- Mommy Dearest/Growing up dysfunctional
- Escape from religious extremism
- I'll take you there (zeitgeist)
- I will survive memoirs/disaster
- Love and romance
- Family, friendship, and business relationships
- Workplace or career/business
- Exploration or adventure
- Illness
- Addiction/recovery memoirs
- Humor
- Call to action

# Six pivotal moments

What events have made you YOU?

1. Learned to read, and from that, that there was someone behind the words
2. Decided to go to grad school for writing, not knowing if it was a good idea or not
3. Decided to go into a profession that was uncreative in order to keep writing
4. Finished my first book.
5. Got married (learned about love)
6. Grieved (learned about loss)

## 6 Word Memoir

- For sale, baby shoes, never worn.
  - Fall down, get up.  
And repeat.
  - Words strung  
together make a life.

Choose a theme/time frame!

You, as a character, have to have a character arc.

We see that character change through narrative arc. This is crucial.

You *have* to choose.



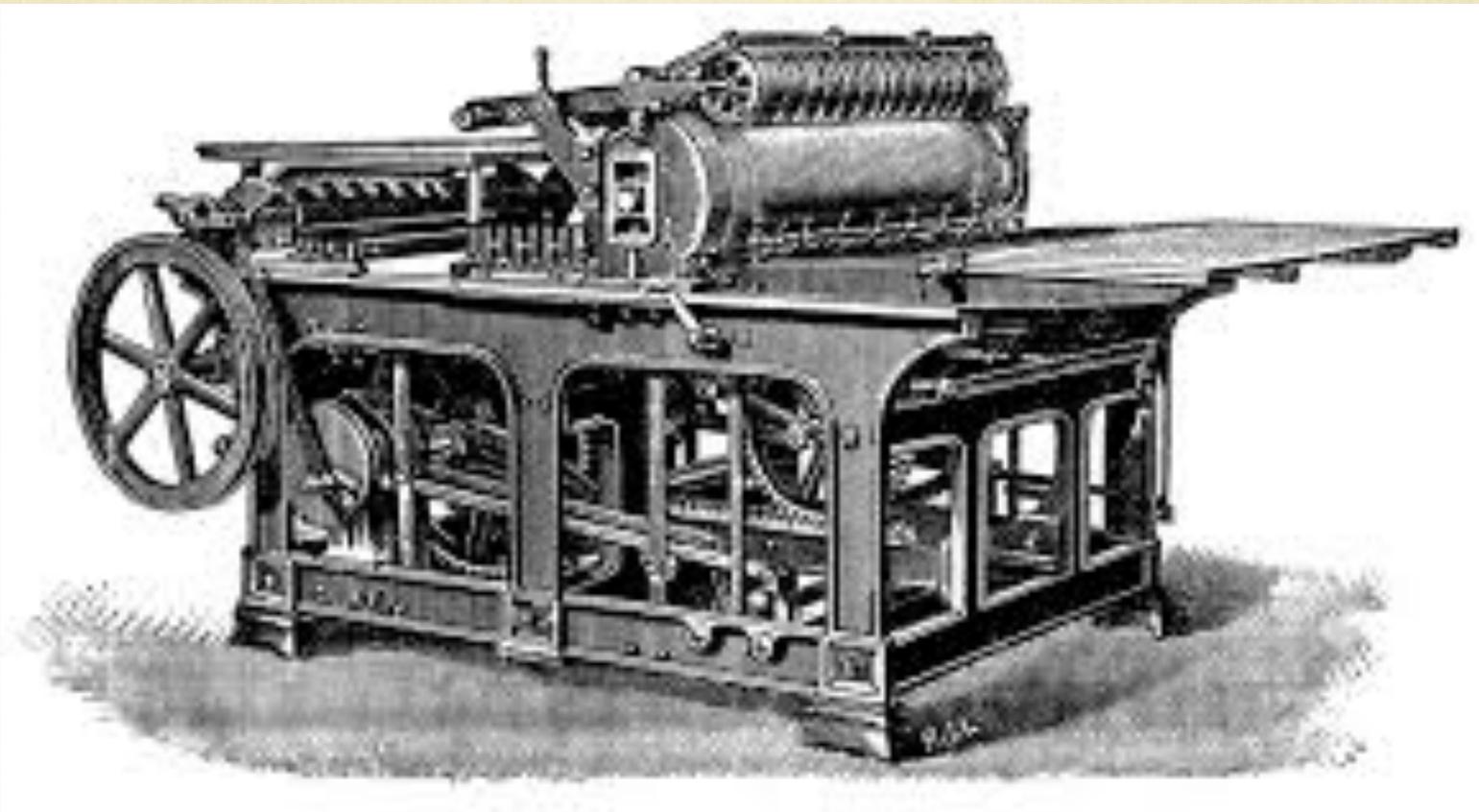
## Character Arc

- Who has one?
- All heroes (and antiheroes)
- You're the hero.



# Why Tell Stories?

- We want to cause an EMOTIONAL REACTION.
- The 3-act structure has been around since the Greeks, almost unchanged in its form.
- Plays and oration were the only form of storytelling for thousands of years until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Why?



# The Structure of Stories (narrative arc)

- They're built this way for a reason.



# Your Brain on Words

- Our brains believe the tale.
- Classical language areas of the brain involved in language processing: Broca's Area and Wernicke's area.
- But in 2012, a study found that words with strong odor associations (lavender, coffee) lit up olfactory cortex. (NeuroImage Journal)
- Words like velvet and leathery light up the sensory cortex.
- Words like kick or grab light up the motor cortex.

- Keith Oatley (emeritus professor of cognitive psychology, U of Toronto) has proposed that reading produces a vivid simulation of reality, one that “runs on minds of readers just as computer simulations run on computers.”

Why we scream in movies

# Story Structure (Plot)

There are as many ways to structure books as there are writers writing about writing (A LOT!)

Common structures you may be familiar with:

Hero's Journey (Joseph Campbell)

3-act Structure (Aristotle)

Save the Cat (Blake Snyder)

4-act Structure (Larry Brooks) ← MY FAVE

Story Grid

2 sentences!

The most important parts of my life are measured in tiny things: words and stitches. My life's trajectory can be tracked by writing about the sweaters I've made.

Six-Word Memoir  
Six Pivotal Moments  
Two sentences

LIFE OUTLINE (in chronological order)

A LONELY LIFE

1. I was born lonely
  - a. My mother liked to tell me she didn't see me for the first ten days of my life
  - b. I was an only child raised in an old-age home
  - c. I wasn't good at sharing anything
2. I was lonely in grade school
  - a. Kids never remembered what my name was
  - b. Teachers didn't notice when I wasn't there
3. I chose a profession in which I could excel at being lonely
  - a. Park ranger in national forest, wildfire lookout, why I wanted it
  - b. First day on the job, fell out of basket
  - c. Boss known to roar – the stories I heard.
4. KEEP THIS GOING to 8, 9, 10+

# Memoir Outline

8-10 Chapters

2-3 scenes per chapter

In chronological order (you can  
play with time later)

# Why Not To Write a Memoir

- The Anger Memoir
- The I'm So Awesome Memoir
- The I'm So Sad Memoir
- The I Have a Terrible Memory Memoir
  - TRICK! This one is okay!

# Shame

- The most universal emotion
- The strongest emotion

# Shame vs. Guilt

- BRENE BROWN:
- I believe that **guilt** is adaptive and helpful – it's holding something we've done or failed to do up against our values and feeling psychological discomfort.
- I define **shame** as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.

# Shame

- The less we talk about it, the stronger it grows
- The more we talk about it, the weaker it becomes (and everyone leans in to really, really listen).

# Getting it Done

- In 45 hours? Yes. This is doable.
- What kind of draft will this be?
- What if I have to edit as I go?

# Tools I Use

- Freedom
- 45/15s
- Write or Die / Written Kitten
- Community: RWA, MWA, SFFWA, NaNoWriMo, Twitter
- Dictation

# What Comes Next?

- How to publish your memoir.
  - Trad or Self?
  - Hire your own editor?
    - NYBookEditors.com
    - Reedsy.com

# FAST-DRAFT

*your*

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Available on all digital sales platforms (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iBooks, etc.)

Also available in paperback and audiobook!

E-book - \$5.99

Paperback - \$11.99

# Stay in Touch!

- RachaelHerron.com
- Writer's weekly email: [RachaelHerron.com/write](http://RachaelHerron.com/write)
- Coaching: [RachaelHerron.com/coach](http://RachaelHerron.com/coach)
- Twitter/Facebook
- Retreats (West Coast in Sept, Venice in April)
- Podcasts:
  - How Do You Write?
  - The Writer's Well